

Disabled travellers



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Disabled travellers

Travel can be challenging for everyone. General information on staying safe overseas and what help you can receive if you do get into difficulties is available on the Foreign & Commonwealth Office travel website (www.gov.uk/knowbeforeyougo). This includes the following information for all travellers:

- > Make sure your **passport is valid** and in good condition, and that you have any **necessary visas**. Fill in the next of kin details in your passport. For advice on passports visit the UK Passport Service website at www.gov.uk/hmpo or call them on 0300 222 0000.
- > **Leave copies** of your passport, insurance policy (plus the insurer's 24-hour emergency number), ticket details, your itinerary and contact details with your family and friends.
- > At least six weeks before you travel, check with your doctor what **vaccinations and other health precautions** you may need to take for your trip. **Take enough prescribed medicine** with you to see you through your trip and to allow for any delays. Take a copy of your prescriptions with you, to satisfy foreign customs authorities of your requirements, or to facilitate obtaining fresh supplies.

- > **Take enough money** for your trip and some back-up funds, such as traveller's cheques or credit cards. Before you leave, find out how you can replace these if lost or stolen and keep a separate note of their numbers.
- > Get a good guidebook and **get to know your destination** before you go. Find out about local laws and customs and follow them. Be aware of your personal security and take sensible precautions to protect yourself.
- > Ensure you have comprehensive travel insurance that is appropriate to your needs.

But some travellers may want to plan trips with particular care, taking into account other considerations depending on their circumstances. These travellers might include disabled people.

Before you go

Booking a holiday

- > All holidays and travel benefit from a bit of advance thought and planning. So be realistic – begin by listing your needs, especially if you intend to book independently.
- > Research your destination and the facilities that are available, such as ease of access and transport options. Consult widely including good guidebooks, disability organisations in the UK and the Embassy/High Commission of the country you plan to visit, specialist tour operations and tourist boards. Don't forget to always check our travel website: **www.gov.uk/knowbeforeyou** for information to help British nationals make informed decisions about their safety abroad (see note 1). The website includes information on threats to personal safety arising from political unrest, conflicts, terrorist activities, anti-British demonstrations, lawlessness, violence, natural disasters, epidemics and aircraft and shipping safety.
- > Our travel website also contains important general information on safety abroad, under the heading 'Know Before You Go'.

Note 1:

While we take particular care in preparing our travel information, it is general and may change. Neither the UK Government nor any government official can accept liability for injury, loss or damage arising from any statement contained in it.

- > Your disability, impairment or health condition and the facilities offered by the holiday provider will affect the type of holiday you choose. It is up to you to consider how comfortable you are likely to be in different environments, unfamiliar climates and in places where language may be a problem.
- > When contacting holiday providers, airlines, hotels etc, clearly state your needs and what assistance you require. Just telling people you have a particular disability doesn't mean that they will understand your needs, so clearly explain them. You might find it helpful to use a standard form: the Association of British Travel Agents provides a 'Checklist for Disabled and Less Mobile Passengers' at www.abta.com/consumer-services/accessible_travel. Confirm enquiries, bookings and reservations in writing. Double check all arrangements before departure.
- > Consider whether you will be accompanied by someone to provide personal assistance or whether you need additional support to be provided.
- > Discuss your preferred means of communication with the travel organiser, for example information in large print or Braille.

- > Most disabled people do not need to get medical clearance before travelling. However, some airlines may ask for evidence of fitness to travel and satisfy themselves of your ability to attend to your personal needs. If you have a medical condition, you and your doctor may need to complete a Medical Information Form (MEDIF). The form is only valid for one trip and can only be used on the flights and dates shown on your ticket. Frequent travellers with an impairment which is a stable condition, may be able to obtain a Frequent Travellers' Medical Card (FREMEC). This gives the airline a permanent record of your specific needs, so that you do not have to fill in a form and make arrangements every time you travel.
- > Since July 2007, airlines and tour operators may not refuse to carry passengers, or to take bookings, on the basis of reduced mobility. This applies only to flights from airports in the EU. **Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006** provides that a reservation or boarding can only be refused for justified safety reasons or if the boarding or transport of a person with a disability or reduced mobility is physically impossible, due to the size of the aircraft or its doors. If the person is refused a reservation, an acceptable alternative must be offered. If boarding is refused, the person must be offered reimbursement or re-routing. Airport authorities are obliged to provide assistance without extra cost to the person concerned but it may levy a charge on all passengers. Other provisions under this Regulation came into force on 26 July 2008. These include:
 - > The airport authority is responsible for ensuring that the intending passenger receives the necessary assistance from designated points of arrival at the airport to the point

of boarding the aircraft. There is a similar provision for passengers who are landing at an EU airport.

- > On flights from EU airports, airlines are obliged to provide certain services, such as the carrying of wheelchairs or guide dogs, free of charge.
- > Both airport authorities and airlines are obliged to provide training to their staff so that those providing direct assistance to people with disabilities and reduced mobility should know how to meet their needs. All staff working at the airport should be provided with disability equality and awareness training.

Checking facilities

It is your responsibility to make sure that the carrier and holiday provider is given all the relevant details of your requirements at all stages of the journey. So think about what kind of facilities or support you will need.

Points to consider include:

Transport

- > What are your needs during all parts of the journey, including at departure, whilst onboard, at stopovers, during transfer journeys and at destination? Try to pre-book your seat – different transport carriers have different policies so check the terms of any pre-booking. Find out about toilet accessibility and special dietary requirements.

- > What assistance is available, for example at check-in, moving around the terminal, on boarding and disembarking?
- > What is the policy on taking an assistance dog? Are any veterinary certificates and identification required? What is the procedure for carriage of the dog? The dog may also be subject to quarantine regulations. You may be able to benefit from the Pet Travel Scheme (www.gov.uk/take-pet-abroad). However, entry regulations for animals vary for each country so contact that country's nearest Embassy, High Commission or local tourist board in advance. It is also worth checking whether dog food – especially meat products – from the UK can be taken into that country.
- > What is the policy on taking any equipment you may need such as wheelchairs, portable machines, batteries, respirators or oxygen? Some airlines will not take certain types of batteries such as wet cell batteries or oxygen cylinders. There may be packing procedures to follow, you may be asked about the make and type of your equipment, and there may be forms to complete.

Accommodation

Be specific about your requirements – ask for whatever you need to make your stay comfortable and ask for written confirmation that they are available. Your travel agent or tour operator should be able to advise you, but you may also decide to call the hotel, resort or cruise liner directly to speak to someone who is familiar with the rooms. You may want to think about the following:

- > Wheelchair access. Is there step free access to all the main areas of the hotel, resort or ship? Are there charging facilities for electrical equipment such as a wheelchair?
- > If you have mobility needs or are visually impaired, you should check on the access to public rooms, restaurants, bars, toilets, swimming pool, beach etc.
- > Can any equipment you need be hired locally, such as back rests, bathing equipment, hoists, ramps and special mattresses? Information may be available from local disability groups at your destination.
- > Whether a lift is available and if so what size is it? Will your wheelchair or other equipment fit?
- > Location of the bedrooms. Can you be on the ground floor if you wish or near a suitable lift?
- > Do the bedroom facilities fit your needs, for example, is the door wide enough, does it open outwards or inwards?
- > Do the bathroom facilities fit your needs, for example, is the room large enough: is there a roll-in shower or grab-bars?
- > Can your dietary requirements be met?
- > Are there facilities for assistance dogs?
- > Are there shopping and entertainment facilities within easy reach of your accommodation? Can your needs be met during any excursions?

Car use

- > If you intend to take or hire a car, the Blue Badge Scheme now operates throughout the EU. Adapted cars are now available for hire in many countries. Make sure you know the licence requirements, driving laws and driving conditions of the country you are visiting.
- > When hiring a car, make sure the company is fully aware of your needs and check the level of insurance they offer – you may feel it is a good idea to extend the insurance.
- > If you need a taxi, try to book one in advance and state your needs. But be aware that, in many areas, accessible vehicles will not be available. If you are visually impaired, the Royal National Institute for the Blind has produced a sign to help hail taxis. The RNIB helpline number is 0303 123 9999 and their website is **www.rnib.org.uk**

Insurance

Always make sure that you have full travel insurance. In many countries the cost of medical treatment in the event of illness or accident can be very high, so it is essential that you take out a full travel insurance policy. If not, you will normally have to pay the costs of any emergency yourself.

Anyone travelling within the European Economic Area (See note 2) or Switzerland should also get a free European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). You can apply for an EHIC online at **www.nhs.co.uk/ehic**, by phone on 0300 3301350 or at the Post Office.

Make sure your insurance is up-to-date, valid for the entire trip and covers everyone who is travelling. When looking for travel insurance, ask

as many questions as possible to ensure that the policy you buy will be right for you. Check exactly what is covered, for example:

- > Medical and repatriation expenses; cancellation of the trip or any delays you may experience.
- > All your luggage and equipment – some standard policies are inadequate for people travelling with mobility equipment such as wheelchairs. But check if these items are covered under your household policy:
 - personal injury as a result of terrorist activity
 - personal liability to others
 - legal costs.

You should also look carefully at exemptions to the policy, including any relating to alcohol and drugs or pre-existing medical conditions. When you declare a medical condition you will generally have to undergo some sort of medical screening. This can mean calling a medical helpline to give details of your condition, or asking your doctor to complete a questionnaire or declaration of fitness to travel. Alternatively, you might simply be required to sign a declaration stating that you are not travelling against doctor's orders, do not have a terminal prognosis, have not received in-patient treatment in the last six months, and are not awaiting treatment or travelling in order to obtain it. If you have a pre-existing medical condition, investigate specialist insurance companies to find the best policy for you – some national charities have arrangements with more helpful insurance companies, for example, the MS Society.

Most disabled people will be able to get insurance through mainstream suppliers instead of approaching 'specialist' insurers. Most

insurance companies offer policies suitable for disabled travellers or for older travellers.

So unless you have a severe or life-threatening medical condition or a mental health history – which many mainstream insurers exclude – it is likely to be worth shopping around. **Always check the small print.**

When looking for an insurance supplier, you should bear in mind any rights you may have under the Equality Act and any corresponding obligations of the insurer. If you feel that you have been discriminated against within the meaning of this Act then you should raise this with the insurer.

Health and medication

If you take medication, you should **ensure that you take enough with you** to see you through the holiday and allow for possible delays. Always keep clearly labelled medication and any medical documents in your hand luggage or in a place you can get to them easily.

It may be essential to have a letter from your doctor stating your need for the medication just in case you lose your medicine, need to get more and particularly if you are going to a country with strict drug controls. You should always be ready to show this letter to customs officers. Because of increased security at airports, it's vital you check with your airline provider what documentation you should take with you to prove the need to carry medication and in what receptacles the medicines should be carried.

The medication you take may contain ingredients which are illegal in some countries. Check with the nearest Embassy or High Commission of the

country you are visiting, to **find out more about any restrictions**.

If you have diabetes and are on medication or have a dietary restriction, you and your doctor should work out an individual schedule for meal times, taking into account the length of your journey and change in time zones.

If flying, ask your doctor if your disability or impairment makes you vulnerable to circulation problems.

It is a good idea to carry a 'travelling letter', which gives a brief description of your disability or impairment and, if appropriate, details of any difficulties that could occur and what assistance you might then need.

If you need to take significantly large, medically related items with you - for example, oxygen - it is vital that you check carriage conditions with your airline provider.

When travelling

Point of departure

Try to check-in early. Airline staff are usually very helpful if queuing causes you difficulties, so make yourself known if it does.

Confirm any arrangements you have with handling agents at the time of check-in and ensure that the carrier crew are aware of any potential problems or concerns you may have.

If you have a hearing or visual impairment you may wish to tell staff, so that you don't miss any announcements or changes to the boarding display screens.

Make sure you label all your baggage, equipment, batteries and hand luggage appropriately, so that it reaches you at your destination or is available to you to collect upon your return to the UK.

When checking-in your luggage, remember that crutches, canes, braces and small removable parts of wheelchairs (e.g. foot rests) may be carried as part of your hand luggage, although these will be included in your weight allowance.

Wheelchairs and other equipment

Remember to take with you any necessary equipment such as spare inner tubes and tools, a voltage converter (check the voltage before you travel), an adaptor plug and transformer.

Wheelchair users are usually boarded first, so it is essential to arrive in good time. Whatever your impairment, if you think you require additional

time to make yourself comfortable, ask to be pre-boarded. If you are a wheelchair user, expect to disembark last on arrival at your destination.

Wheelchair users will be asked to transfer to another chair so that their own wheelchair can be loaded onto the plane. If your wheelchair is anything other than a standard specification, make sure you ask the crew for it to be made available at the door on arrival - the airline may otherwise choose to meet you with one of the airport operator's wheelchair. To avoid loss or damage, remove seat cushions and any other parts that could easily become separated from the chair, and take these items with you.

Attach instructions to scooters or power chairs, saying how and where to disconnect the batteries, and any other dis/assembly or transportation instructions that might be necessary. This is important because, even if you give handlers instructions at the start of your journey, you may not be able to do the same with the handlers when you arrive.

If things go wrong overseas

British nationals take millions of trips overseas every year, most of which pass without any kind of incident. However, if you get into difficulty, such as falling sick, being a victim of crime or facing an emergency, approach the nearest British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate to find out how our consular staff can help you. There is a directory of all our overseas offices on our website at www.gov.uk/government/world. Your holiday representative, local guide, hotel or local police should also have this information. To enable you to make quick contact with people who might be able to help in an emergency it is a good idea to take a charged and overseas activated mobile phone with you.

If you need help in a country where there is no British diplomatic or consular office, you can receive help from the diplomatic or consular office of another member of the European Union. There are also informal arrangements with some Commonwealth countries, including New Zealand and Australia, to help British nationals in some countries.

When offering you support, we will make sure our help is accessible and equal to everyone, no matter what your sex, race, age, sexuality, disability, religion or belief.

What kind of help can we provide?

We offer help which is appropriate to the individual circumstances of each case, including:

- > issuing a replacement Travel Document
- > providing information about transferring funds
- > providing appropriate help if you have suffered rape or serious assault, are a victim of other crime, or are in hospital
- > providing details of local lawyers, interpreters, doctors and funeral directors (See note 3)
- > doing all we properly can to contact you within 24 hours of being told you have been detained
- > offering support and help in a range of other cases, such as child abductions, death of relatives overseas, missing people and kidnapping
- > contacting family or friends for you if you want, and where necessary, making appropriate special arrangements for British nationals in cases of terrorism, civil disturbances or natural disasters. For some of these services, we are obliged to charge a fee – full details are available from our website: **www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office/series/consular-fees** and will be displayed in the waiting rooms of consular sections in our offices overseas

We cannot:

- > get you out of prison, prevent the local authorities from deporting you after your prison sentence, or interfere in criminal or civil court proceedings
- > help you enter a country, for example if you do not have a visa or your passport is not valid, as we cannot interfere in another country's immigration policy or procedures
- > give you legal advice, investigate crimes or carry out searches for missing people, though we can give you details of people who may be able to help you in these cases, such as English-speaking lawyers
- > get you better treatment in hospital or prison than is given to local people
- > pay any bills or give you money. (In very exceptional circumstances we may be able to lend you some money, from public funds, which you will have to pay back.)
- > find you work or accommodation
- > make business arrangements on your behalf.

Useful contacts

Department for Transport

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0300 330 3000

www.gov.uk/dft

Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA)

30 Park Street
London
SE1 9EQ

Tel: 020 3117 0599

www.abta.com/go-travel

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA)

Pet Travel Scheme

Tel: 0870 241 1710

Textphone: 0845 300 1998

Fax: 01245 458 749

Email: pettravel@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/take-pet-abroad

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Freepost

Equality Advisory Support Service

FPN 4431

Tel: 0808 800 0082

Textphone: 0808 800 0084

Fax: 0845 604 6630

www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Disabled Living Foundation

Ground Floor

Landmark House

Hammersmith

Bridge Road

London

W6 9EJ

Helpline: 0300 999 004 10am-4pm Monday to
Friday

Email: helpline@dlf.org.uk

www.dlf.org.uk

Tourism for All

Provides information fact sheets about travel within the UK and overseas for elderly and disabled people,

7A Pixel Mill,
44 Appleby Road,
Kendal, Cumbria,
LA9 6ES.

Tel: 0845 1249 971 (UK only-for overseas contact use 0044 1539 726 111)

Fax: 01539 735567

Email: info@tourismforall.org.uk

www.tourismforall.org.uk



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Tell us what you think!

Giving us feedback

We welcome your views on the support we provide. They will help us to identify what we do well and what we could do better. Visit **www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office/about/research** for our customer satisfaction survey, or ask your local Embassy or Consulate for a copy. Information about our official complaints procedure is also on this website.

If you prefer to contact us directly our contact details are:

Consular Directorate

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

Email: feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk

Tel: +44 (0)20 7008 1500



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